

Mound crossing's history is 'riveting'

By Staff Reporter

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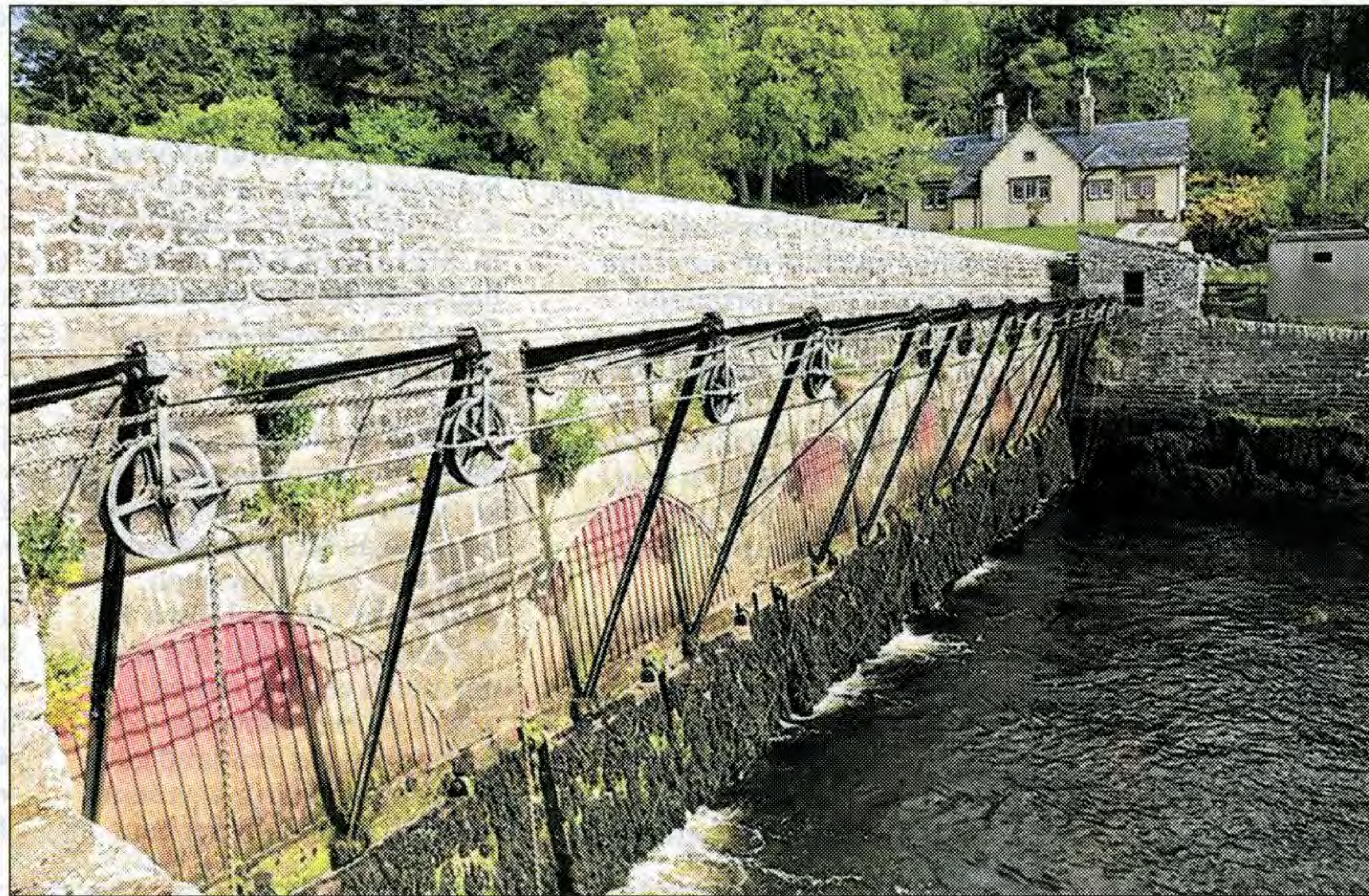
RETIRED civil engineer Bruce Field of Golspie gave a fascinating account to Lairg Local History Society at its meeting last month of the history of the causeway and sluices at The Mound, near Golspie.

Mr Field, who qualified as a civil engineer in the 1950s and moved to Sutherland in 1972 to take up a post with the local authority, told how in 1801 a parliamentary commission asked Thomas Telford to report on the state of the roads north of the Highland line.

It found that Caithness and Sutherland had no roads or vehicles outside its urban areas.

Originally the plan was to cross Loch Fleet at Littleferry and an access road from the Trentham Hotel to Littleferry South still exists today. However the Meikleferry disaster of 1809, when 119 people died, may have been the deciding factor to consider building a causeway, with four sluices, across The Mound.

Construction began in 1814, with Patrick Sellars and William Young of Sutherland Estates in charge. The gap was closed in 1816, and the final cost was £9280. Later, it was



The pulley system enables the sluice gates at The Mound to be opened manually. The historic gates are of special architectural interest and are part of the Grade A listed causeway at The Mound.

found that not enough land water was being taken away and therefore two more sluice gates were constructed.

Mr Field explained that the sluice gates prevent sea water travelling further upstream at high tide, but still allow river water out when the tide recedes. The gates are self-regulating but a pulley system was

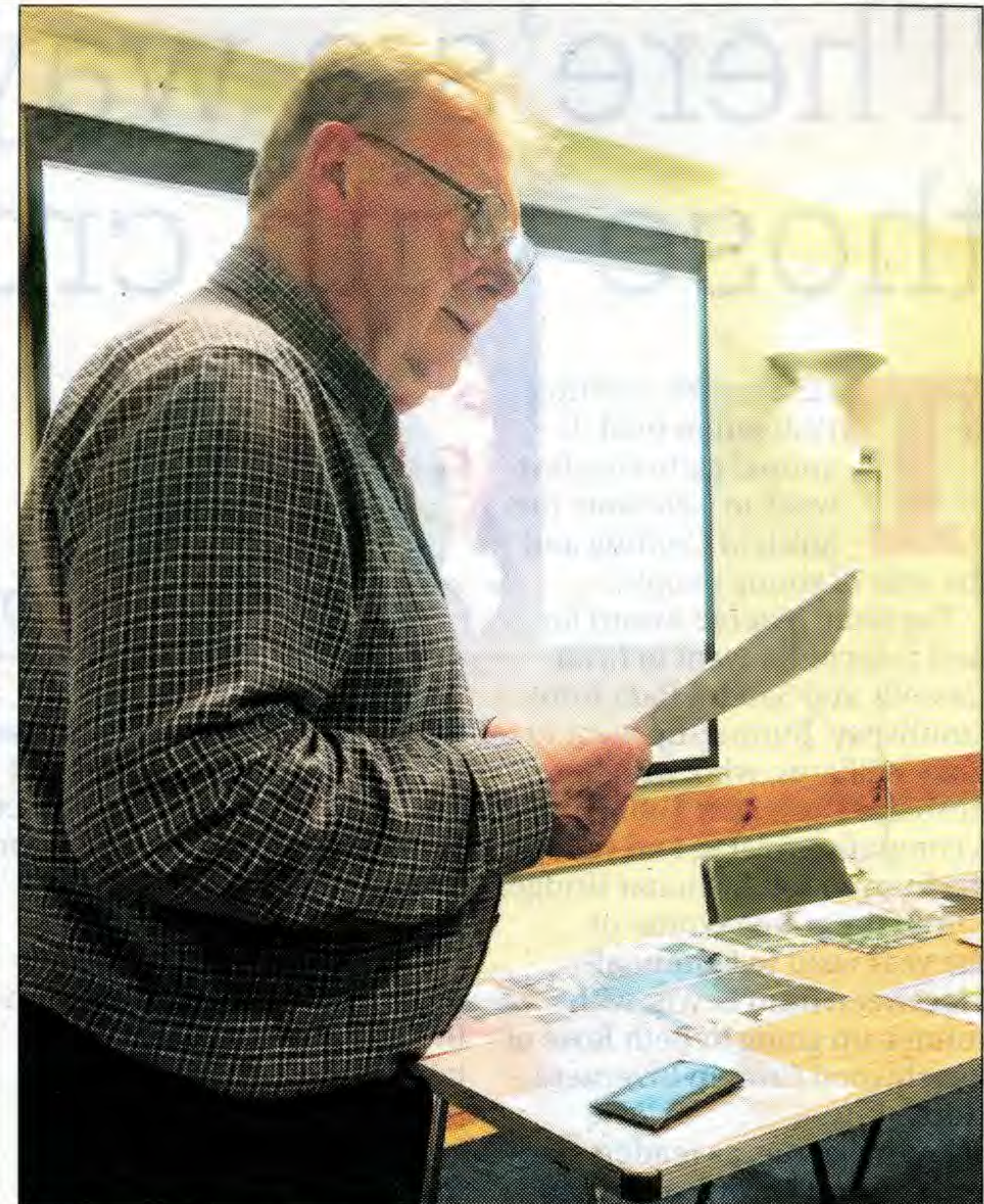
installed in 1833 under the direction of Thomas Telford to allow them to be raised manually at times when the river was in spate.

Salmon wait in the pool below the bridge until the sluice gates open as the tide goes out before continuing their journey upstream to spawn.

The causeway carried the

Dornoch Light Railway until its closure in 1960 and still carries the main road, although the road now crosses a modern bridge rather than the stone arched bridge.

The crossing had a significant effect on the ecology of the river estuary as it stops the sea water 2km short of its natural high tide mark.



Bruce Field project managed the 1982 restoration.

The build-up of silt above the bridge made the land ideal for alder and willow growing. The Mound Alderwood is now one of the largest in Britain and a national nature reserve.

Mr Field's presentation included various pictures of The Mound taken at different periods, including the sluice-keeper's house, which was built in 1815.

In 1971 the causeway was made a Grade A building of special architectural interest. Also in the 1970s, funds were provided to restore the structure, which had deteriorated over the years. Some £70,000 was made available over two

years. The work was started in 1982 and carried out by the council's roads department, with men working tidal shifts, at night when necessary and six days a week.

Mr Field was the project manager and the team included J Ross, Golspie, foreman/joiner; H Macdonald, Saval, Lairg; Alan Mackay, Brora, and blacksmith Terry Pennington of Golspie.

Bear Scotland now maintain and manages all trunk roads including The Mound, and has since done some more work on it, with automatic flood sensors now installed on both sides.